

Adopted: May 19, 1944

File No. 4066-43

REPORT OF THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD
on the
Investigation of an Accident Involving Aircraft
During a Test Flight

Donald Whittam was seriously injured in an accident which occurred approximately one mile west-northwest of Turners Falls Airport, Turners Falls, Massachusetts, about 3:30 p.m. on September 20, 1943. Whittam held a commercial pilot certificate with single-engine land, 0-80 h.p., and autogiro 80-450 h.p. ratings. He had accumulated approximately 2600 hours of solo flight time, of which over 1100 were in autogiros. The aircraft, a Pittcairn PCA-3 Autogiro, NC 11612, owned by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, was extensively damaged.

Whittam took off from Turners Falls Airport at approximately 3:00 p.m. for the purpose of testing the aircraft which had been in storage. After several flights in and out of the airport, the pilot flew over Greenfield, Massachusetts, then descended to 300 feet above the ground to examine the landing possibilities of a field near the Department of Agriculture buildings at Greenfield. He then flew northeast and came down to just over tree tops to simulate forest spraying operations, for which the aircraft was to be used. While practicing this type of flying over a wooded peninsula in the Connecticut River, the left landing gear caught in some power wires and a supporting cable. The aircraft veered sharply to the left and dived into trees on the river bank.

The pilot stated, "I do not believe there was any engine or structural failure but that the accident was caused by my failure to see these wires while practicing spraying with the involved aircraft." The wires were supported by poles partially obscured from view by trees on the bank of the river. This aircraft carried a Certificate of Waiver of Air Traffic Rules exempting it from minimum flight altitudes and its Operation Record authorized crop dusting and spraying.

The cause of this accident was failure of the pilot to observe and avoid an obstruction in his flight path.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Toombs
Secretary